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STATE FOR NEA AND DRL

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TAGS: PGOV ASEC PHUM BA  
SUBJECT: TRIAL OF DECEMBER RIOTERS

REF: A. MANAMA 77  
1B. MANAMA 51

11. (U) Summary: The trial of fifteen men arrested in connection with the December riots resumed without incident. Defense lawyers ended their boycott and were present when the court formally charged the defendants. All pled "not guilty," and the judge set the next hearing for March 17. Several accused stated that they had been physically and mentally abused in pre-trial custody. The judge agreed to a defense request for new medical examinations to investigate the defendants' claims. Family, human rights activists, and media were also present for the hearing, and the detainees were permitted to visit briefly with their families. End summary.

12. (U) Manama's High Criminal Court resumed the trial of the 15 December riot defendants on February 24 amid tight security. The defendants appeared along with their attorneys and pled "not guilty" to a list of charges that included assaulting a police officer, stealing a police weapon, illegal possession of a police weapon, stealing ammunition magazines, burning a police vehicle, and participating in an illegal demonstration. (Note: Contrary to ref A report that the charges included attempted murder, the charges as read out during the hearing did not include attempted murder, only assaulting a police officer. End note.)

13. (SBU) According to press reports, several of the defendants told the judge that they had been subjected to sleep deprivation, forced to stand for long periods, placed in restraints for long periods, and stripped naked. Mohammed Al-Singace repeated his claim (widely reported by Shi'a activists and human rights organizations) that he had been subjected to sexual abuse while in custody. (Note: As reported ref B, a Ministry of Interior forensic doctor had examined the defendants in January and reported finding no evidence to support their claims. End note.) Defense attorneys requested that the court allow new doctors to conduct further examinations of the defendants and investigate their allegations. Judge Muhammed bin Ali Al-Khalifa initially denied the motion, then reversed his decision on February 25. The judge ordered Minister of Health Dr. Faisal Al-Hamer to appoint a panel of doctors from the Ministry of Health to examine the defendants in light of their allegations and present its findings to the court before the next hearing on March 17.

14. (SBU) Two local human rights activists, Mohammed Al-Maskati and Abdullah Al-Derazi, were present in the courtroom for the hearing along with designated local representatives for the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) and Human Rights Watch. Al-Maskati represented

Defend International, while Al-Derazi attended on behalf of the Bahrain Human Rights Society. Al-Derazi (please protect) told poloff that the Bahraini authorities "did everything right procedurally" at the February 24 hearing, and that the judge agreed to enter the abuse allegations into the record. He said that each defendant had two relatives in the courtroom and that they were permitted to visit with those family members for approximately ten minutes at the conclusion of the hearing. Al-Derazi, who maintains close contact with the defense attorneys, also confirmed that the judge had agreed to allow a medical examination of the detainees.

¶15. (SBU) The defendants' supporters continue seeking to focus public attention on the trial. On February 22, they staged a licensed demonstration in central Manama. Riot police were present, but did not intervene, as 500-600 people carried banners (many in English) demanding the release of the detainees. By comparison, some 8,000 people participated the next day in a licensed demonstration against the re-publication of the Danish cartoons.

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